

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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SUBJECT: RABIN AS NEGOTIATOR; AN ASSESSMENT

1. PRIME MINISTER

RABIN IN TALKS THIS WEEK WITH PRESIDENT FORD WILL BE TOUGH AND CONFIDENT NEGOTIATOR. CABINET HAS JUST ENDORSED POSITION THAT GOI'S MARCH DECISIONS ARE STILL VALID AND THAT ANY NEW ISRAELI FLEXIBILITY DEPENDS ON EGYPT SHOWING READINESS TO MAKE NEW CONCESSIONS. AS MUCH AS RABIN SINCERELY WANTS TO ACHIEVE INTERIM EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT, HE WILL NOT MAKE NEW CONCESSIONS UNILATERALLY, AND HE IS ASSURED THAT THIS POSITION WOULD ENJOY STRONG SUPPORT BOTH AT CABINET LEVEL AND WITH ISRAELI PUBLIC.

2. RABIN'S DECISION IN MARCH TO REUSE WITHDRAWAL FROM ENTIRE PASSES AND OIL FIELDS IN ABSENCE OF EGYPTIAN NON-BELLIGERENCY COMMITMENT WAS SEEN BY MOST ISRAELIS AS HIGH WATER MARK OF HIS FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE. DECISION WAS INTERPRETED HERE AS STANDING UP TO U.S. AND EGYPT, AND IT WAS SUPPORTED BY ISRAELIS OF ALMOST ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS.

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3. RABIN'S DOMESTIC POSITION TODAY IS FIRM. ALTHOUGH

NOT A CHARISMATIC LEADER IN MOLD OF BEN GURION, THERE IS BROAD CONSENSUS THAT FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE HE IS HERE TO STAY. THERE IS NO IMMEDIATE THREAT OF A CHALLENGE TO HIS LEADERSHIP,

NOR ANY EVIDENT PRESSURE FOR EARLY ELECTION. PROPONENTS OF NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT IN OPPOSITION CAMP ARE BESET BY THEIR OWN TROUBLES.

4. ON APPROACH TO NEGOTIATION, CABINET REMAINS DIVIDED ON PREFERRED APPROACH. RABIN ENJOYS BACKING OF MOST OF LABOR PARTY AND NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY IN CONTINUING TO FAVOR STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH, WHILE MINORITY VOICES OF MAPAM AND INDEPENDENT LIBERALS FAVOR SEEKING OVERALL PEACE INITIATIVE. THEY, AS WELL AS FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER EBAN AND OTHERS WHO HAVE BEEN URGING THAT GOI DECIDE NOW ON OVERALL ISRAELI PEACE INITIATIVE, STILL LACK SUFFICIENT CLOUT TO COMPEL SHIFT IN GOI POLICY.

5. IN RECENT MONTHS, RABIN HAS STRENGTHED HIS CONTROL OVER GOI DECISION-MAKING MECHANISM. NEGOTIATING TROIKA(RABIN, ALLON AND PERES) STILL EXISTS, AND DOUBTLESS WOULD WORK AGAIN TOGETHER IF AND WHEN NEW ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS GETS UNDERWAY. BUT RABIN LATELY HAS BEEN MAKING MORE DECISIONS BY HIMSELF(E. G. SHARON AND ZEEVI APPOINTMENTS), AND IS REPEATEDLY USING HIS ADVISERS INCREASINGLY ONLY IN TECHNICAL, NOT POLICY-MAKING CAPACITY.

6. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ALL THE COMPLEXITIES OF ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE, PARTICULARLY THE DIVERSITIES OF VIEWS WITHIN THE CABINET AND NARROW MARGIN OF RULING COALITION, WE NONETHELESS BELIEVE RABIN TODAY IS THE DETERMINING FORCE OF ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY. ESSENTIALLY
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A PRAGMATIST--NEITHER A DOVE NOR A HAWK--HE FIRMLY BELIEVES IN CORRECTNESS OF POSITION HE TOOK IN MARCH AND IN LEGITIMACY OF DEMANDING NOW THAT NEXT MOVE IS UP TO EGYPT. HE HAS NO DOUBT BEEN ENCOURAGED, NOT ONLY BY SUPPORT THIS STAND ENJOYS IN ISRAELI PUBLIC OPINION, BUT BY INDICATIONS THAT KEY

SECTORS OF U.S. OPINION, PARTICULARLY IN CONGRESS,
ARE STILL FIRMLY BEHIND ISRAEL(LETTER OF 76 SENATORS HAD
STRONG IMPACT ON HIM). IN SUM, HE IS MORE ASSURED AND
SELF-CONFIDENT THAN SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, AND WILL BE COMING
TO WASHINGTON FROM WHAT HE PERCEIVES AS POSITION OF
STRENGTH.
VELIOTES

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